

WILL ROGERS MEMORIAL MUSEUM
1720 West Will Rogers Boulevard
Claremore
Rogers
Oklahoma

HALS OK-16
OK-16

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

WILL ROGERS MEMORIAL MUSEUM

HALS NO. OK-16

Location: 1720 West Will Rogers Boulevard, Claremore, Rogers County, Oklahoma.
Lat: 36.32074 Long: -95.63159

Significance: The Will Rogers Memorial Museum is located on land acquired by Will Rogers in 1911 in Claremore, Oklahoma only a few miles from Rogers' childhood home in Oologah. His dream was to retire and build a home on the 20 acre site. However, his death in 1935 prevented this from happening. His wife and children donated the site to the State of Oklahoma for a memorial in his honor. It was completed in 1938. Designed by Tulsa architect John Duncan Forsythe, the ranch-style home was constructed out of locally quarried limestone. The home is surrounded by formal gardens in the Eclectic style, which includes a sunken garden and family tomb. The memorial has served as a cultural and historical resource for the people of Oklahoma since its inception in 1938.

History: The Will Rogers Memorial Museum was established to honor the actor and philanthropist Will Rogers. Rogers purchased the 20 acre site in 1911 with the intention of building a home to retire in overlooking the town of Claremore, Oklahoma. After his untimely death in 1935, his wife Betty Blake Rogers donated the property for a memorial to him. The Oklahoma State Legislature created a memorial commission to design the memorial. In 1937, Tulsa architect John Duncan Forsythe was appointed the general architect. By the end of 1938, with funds appropriated by the State of Oklahoma, the memorial was completed under the direction of contractor W. R. Grimshaw of Tulsa. In 1980, a new wing was added to the site. Then, from 1990 to 1995, the entire museum underwent a \$3 million renovation.

The original ranch-style structure was built of fossilized earth-toned limestone quarried locally on land owned by Newton Foster. The 20 acre site, which Betty Blake Rogers helped design in the Eclectic style, overlooks the Verdigris Valley to the southwest. In 1944, a tomb and sunken garden was added to the site. A marble sarcophagus on a raised dais is located at the Southeast end of the sunken gardens. Directly below is a sealed room containing crypts for members of the Rogers family. Will and son Fred were entombed there in 1944. Ironically, a few weeks after this event Betty died and was subsequently joined her husband and son. Since that time, their son Jim and his wife Astrea, and their daughter Mary have been entombed at the burial site. Directly behind the sarcophagus, on a raised base is a bronze statue of Will Rogers facing west on his favorite horse holding his hat in his right hand. It was designed and built by Electra Waggoner.

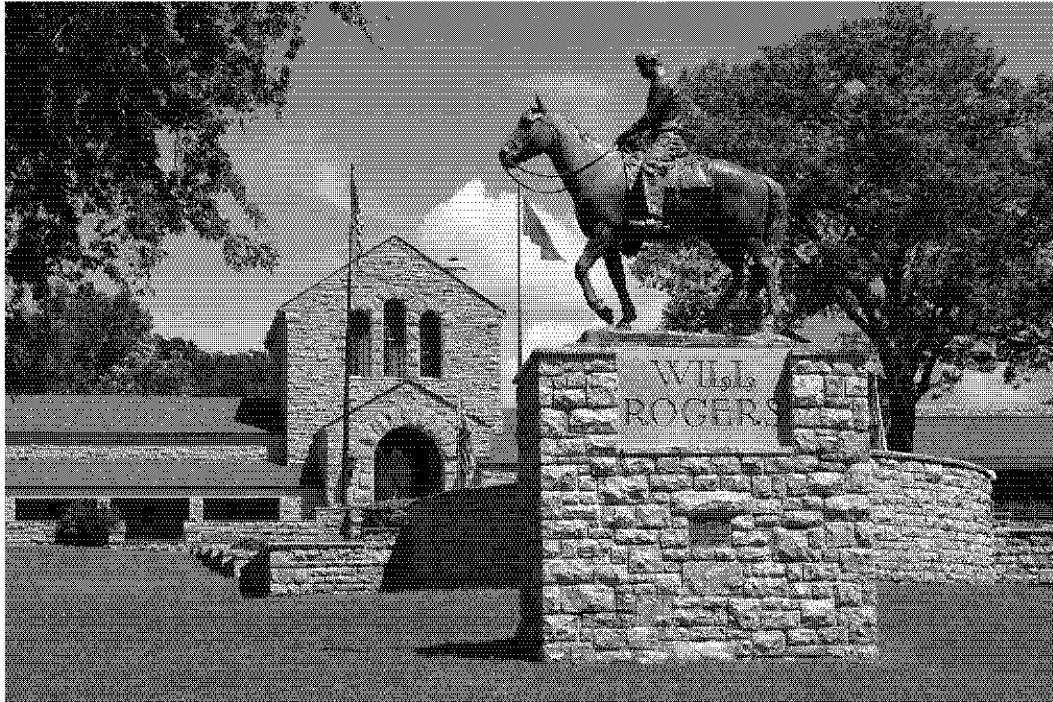
Today, the 16,652 square-foot Will Rogers Memorial Museum is home to a 2,400 square-foot library and extensive archives of manuscripts, books, photographs, and personal papers of Rogers. Other personal objects commemorating his life are on display. The museum also is home to a sizable collection of fine art.

Sources: "Will Rogers Memorial Museums," <http://www.willrogers.com/> (accessed May 7, 2009).

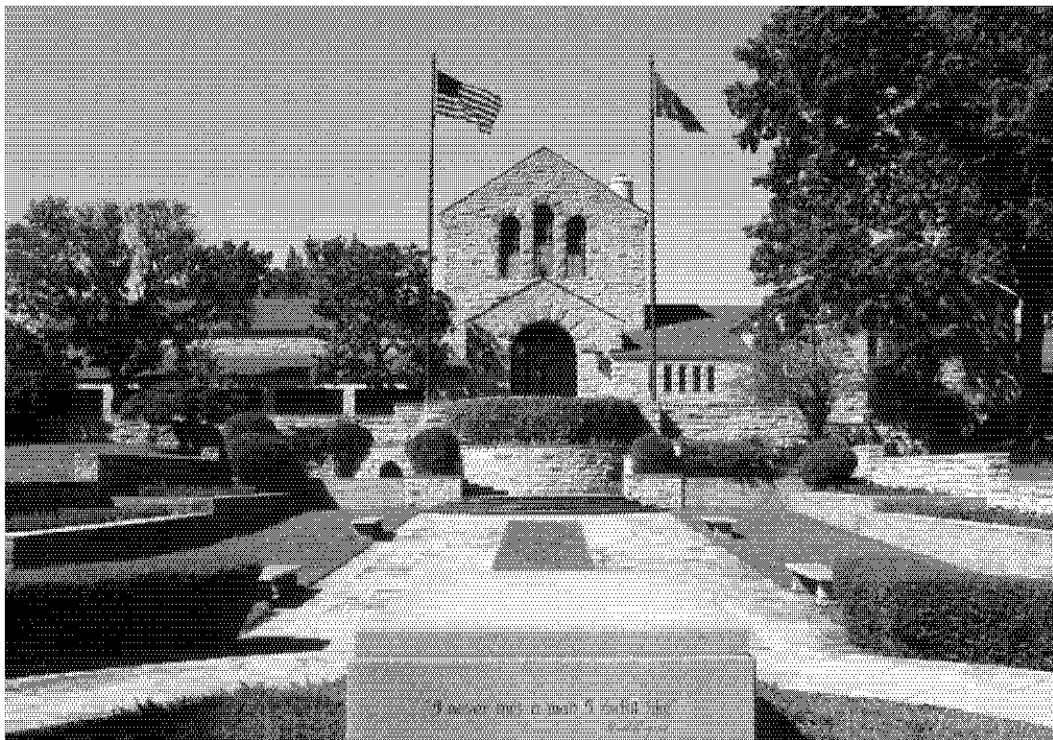
Records located in the Rogers County Court Clerk's Office, Rogers County Courthouse, 219 S. Missouri, Claremore, Oklahoma 74018.

Historian: Steve Eilers, October 3, 2009
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View of museum with Electra Waggoner statue of Will Rogers in foreground
(<http://www.willrogers.com/press.html#stock>, accessed May 7, 2009).



Sunken garden and family tomb (<http://www.willrogers.com/press.html#stock>, accessed May 7, 2009).